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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1924 1581829
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071829Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4937
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001924

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AMMAN AND CAIRO FOR REFCOORDS KANESHIRO AND CHEYNE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/16
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PNAT](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MANDAEANS SAY TARGETING IN IRAQ UNBEARABLE,
REQUEST RESETTLEMENT

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARGARET SCOBAY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. On May 31, Sabian Mandaean spiritual leader Shaykh Sattar Jabbar al-Helo and President of Mandaean Associations Union Dr. Akram Arar, told EmbOffs that the situation for Mandaeans in Iraq had become intolerable. They indicated to EmbOffs that their community had experienced an increased level of targeted violence and intimidation over the past few months. Sattar and Dr. Akram urged EmbOffs to support a refugee designation for Mandaeans in Iraq for those wishing to leave. RefCoord explained that the USG considers individual UNHCR referrals to be the appropriate channel for Iraqi Mandaeans to access the US refugee admissions program. End Summary.

COMMUNITY TARGETED

¶2. (C) On May 31, Mandaean spiritual leader Sheikh Sattar and President of the Mandaean Associations Union Dr. Akram Arar argued to EmbOffs that the level of violence against the Mandaean community had increased dramatically over the past few months. Sattar said that he had been shot at several times, himself, during the same period. He said that some Mandaean shopowners have been killed and others forced to close down their stores. (NOTE: Mandaeans in Iraq are traditionally goldsmiths and reportedly limited in their choices of profession by social pressures. According to Sheikh Sattar, Mandaeans cannot open bakeries because non-Mandaeans will not buy food from them.) Sattar and Akram said that Mandaean stores, primarily goldsmiths located in the Baghdad neighborhoods of Amel, Bayaa, and Karadah, had received threatening letters including accusations of the community's engagement in sorcery, blasphemy and vice. Sheikh Sattar produced two examples of the letters but stressed that the community had received many more.

¶3. (C) The Mandaean representatives explained said many Mandaeans have sold their belongings, packed up, and prepared to leave the country. They expressed concern that leaving Iraq may create a new set of problems for the community. They claimed that there are 1500 Iraqi Mandaean families (about 6,000 people) in Jordan, Syria, and Yemen who are living in poor conditions with no access to education. Sattar said his dilemma is whether to tell his people to stay in Iraq and risk death or leave and risk homelessness.

REQUEST FOR RESETTLEMENT

¶4. (C) Sheikh Sattar said he hoped to identify two countries

to which Mandaean can relocate en masse, so they can maintain sizable communities and preserve their traditions. He mentioned the US, Canada, and Australia as possible options. RefCoord said that the USG welcomes UNHCR referrals of vulnerable Iraqis of all kinds, including Mandaeans, for processing for resettlement to the US. RefCoord told the Sheikh that the USG considers individual UNHCR referrals to be the appropriate channel for Iraqi Mandaeans to access the US refugee admissions program. The Sheikh and his colleagues said they had met with UNHCR several times, in Geneva and in the field. RefCoord recommended that they continue this dialogue to keep UNHCR informed and able to maintain accurate country of origin information for use in refugee status determinations.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Sattar and Akram clearly believe their community is being targeted for threats and violence on religious grounds. Sheikh Sattar, distinctly more downbeat than in previous meetings, said he was thinking of leaving Iraq once his children finish school. He says he has engaged with Shia religious leaders such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Moqtada al-Sadr over the past year, but believes that his community's situation is only worsening.
KHALILZAD